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AN INSCRIBED GOLDEN AMULET OF THE GODDESS ‘UZZAYĀN

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This is a publication of a South Arabian inscribed golden pendent. It is inscribed with two lines and mentions the goddess ‘Uzzayān (al-‘Uzzā) in addition to a woman name that represents the bearer of the amulet, which belongs to the South Arabian type of amulets of protection.

This is a study of an inscribed golden pendent which belongs to the collection of the Archaeological Museum of the University of Ṣan‘āʾ. It has been found in the area of the Yemeni Jawf and particularly the al-Maṣlūb[1] and presented to the museum on 28.12.1985.[2] Its measurements are as follows: length 3 cm, height 2 cm. It has the register number A-50-858. The technique and the fashion of the piece are similar to a golden inscribed Hadhrami pendent from the British Museum collection. Our piece has a crescent shape and is inscribed with two lines in old South Arabian letters. It is difficult to determine the language just from the inscription. However, if the information of the place of its discovery is correct, we are allowed to consider the language of this piece as Sabaic. Paleographically, the inscription can be dated from the first or second century A.D.

The inscription reads as follows :

1. *ḥgr / ‘zy*^{n}
2. *b-‘ly / Tn‘m / w-wld[.]*

Translation

1. Protection of (the goddess) ‘Uzzayān
2. be upon Tan‘um and her children.

1 Al-Maṣlūb is a district in the Yemeni Jawf, settled by the tribe of Hamdān. There are several archaeological sites in the area especially Malāḥā, s. Maqḥafī, VI. II, 1547f.

2 Unfortunately this pendent disappeared from the museum and the authors are sorry that they could not check the original piece especially to check the reading of the last word. Our publication is depending only on the available photograph from the university museum of Ṣan‘āʾ.

Commentary

The reading of the inscription is quite clear, apart from the last word in the third line, namely *wwld[…]*. The first letter is clearly *wāw* and the second letter seems to be near to *ʿayn* since it is smaller than the *wāw*. The third letter is clearly *lām* and the fourth letter can be read as *dāl*. However, the reading of the last two letters is not sure. A reconstruction of this word as *wld-[h]*, "and her children" or "and be upon …", can be taken into account, but it is not sure. The term *ḥgr* means "protection" and in relation with amulets, it seems that this term has been developed to bear a specific meaning, namely "an amulet of protection". It is a designation of the object itself and is similar to Arabic *ḥiğāb*, which means literally "protection" and it is the term that is still used in many parts of the Arab world to designate an "amulet".

The second word in line one *ʿzy*^{n}/'Uzzayān is the old South Arabian writing for the North Arabian goddess al-'Uzzā. 'Uzzayān is mentioned several times in the South Arabian inscriptions. It builds with the North goddess al-Lāt (South Arabic *Lt*^{n}/Làtan) "the two daughters of ʾIl", and with another North Arabic goddess Manāt (South Arabic *Mnt*), form together "the daughters of ʾIl" which are mentioned in the Qurʾān as "Banāt Allāh" and in the South Arabian inscriptions.[3]

Among several categories of South Arabian amulets there is a type that can be defined as "amulets of protection". Those are of great significance and the most attested type of them is distinguished with the formula ḥgr "protection" + deity name "protection of (protection de la part de la déité = from/protection of a deity= c'est la déité qui est protégée ???) a deity" and then followed by the phrase "be upon someone" and then in some cases ends with the colophon "against evildoer".[4] Our 'Uzzayān-amulet here belongs to this type. Another example for the protection was the power of the deity that strengthens the potentiality of people against evil. This type uses the term *ḥwl* "magical power" and has the same formula and function as *ḥgr* + deity name.[5] However, the people of ancient Yemen used these amulets in the daily life. Amulets order to keep the evil doings away.

3 On the daughter of god, see Robin, Chr. Les « filles de Dieu » de Sabȧ à la Mecque : réflexions sur l'agencement des panthéons dans L'Arabie ancienne, *Semitica* 50, 2001, 113-192.

4 On this type of *ḥgr*-amulets, see Ryckmans, J. 'Uzzā et Lāt dans les inscriptions Sud-Arabes : à propos de deux amulettes méconnues, *JSS* 25, 1980, 193-204. Ein Schutzamulett der altarabischen Göttin al-Lāt, in *Im Lande der Königin von Saba : Kunstschätze aus dem antiken Jemen* (Katalog der Jemen Ausstellung) hrsg Von Staatlichen Museum für Völkerkunde München in Zusammenarbeit mit W. Daum, W.W. Müller, N. Nebes und W. Raunig, München 2000, 148-150, and Maraqten, M. Amulets and Seals, in *Queen of Sheba : Treasures from Ancient Yemen*, ed. By St John Simpson, 2002, 177-179.

5 Maraqten 1996 : An Inscribed Amulet from Shabwa, *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy* 7.

Meanwhile, two amulets of the goddess ‘Uzzayān that belong to this type are already known. The first one mentions the shape of a pendent with a perforation similar to other inscribed amulet for wearing. It is inscribed with a 4-line Sabaean inscription. It reads : *ḥgr / ʿzy^{n} / ʿly / nṣrt* “protection of ‘Uzzayān be upon Naṣrat” (CIH 558).[6] The bearer of this amulet is a man.

The second ‘Uzzayān-amulet occurs as a magical formula engraved on a female statue that was considered by J. Pirenne to be a statue of the goddess ‘Uzzayān. The formula reads *ḥgr / ʿzy^{n}* “protection of *ʿzy^{n}*”.[7]

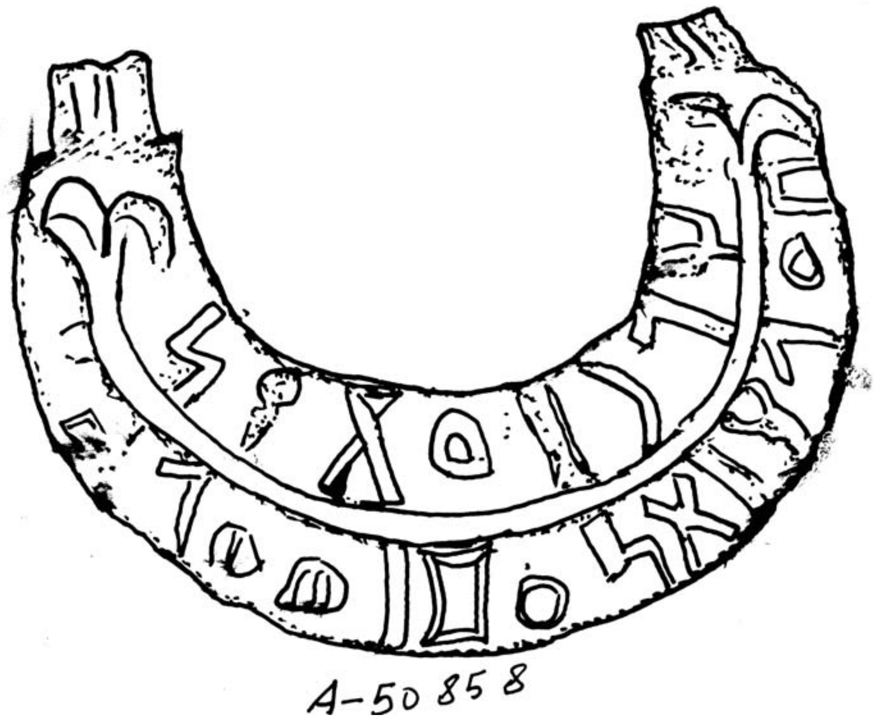
The goddess ‘Uzzayān appears with the goddess Lātān together on inscribed amulets. In an inscribed pendent that can be considered as an amulet of protection of ‘Uzzayān and Lātān. This bronze pendent has the form of a South Arabian altar and bears a perforation through the length for wearing it with a string possibly around the neck. It is inscribed in a 4-line Sabaean inscription. The correct interpretation of this inscription is due to J. Ryckmans. The inscription reads as follows: *ḥgr / ʿzyn / wltn / ʿly / rfʾnṯhw* / *b-mhbʾsm* “Protection of ‘Uzzayān and Lātān be upon Rafảnāṯahw against evil doer”. The goddess al-Lāt occurs here in the written with the Sabaean definite article *–n*. The bearer of this amulet was a Sabaean woman.[8]

In a recently discovered golden inscribed pendent from Šaʻūb, near Ṣanʻā’, the two line inscription reads: *ḥgr / ʾmrn / b‘ly / b‘lt*.[9]

In our inscribed pendent the preposition *b‘ly* means “upon, be upon” and is an expression of wishing that “the protection of the goddess” be upon the person who wears this amulet. The majority of the South Arabian inscribed amulets uses the preposition *‘ly* or the Hadhramitic form *‘lhy* in the same meaning “be upon”. However, in the recent published inscribed amulet the preposition b‘ly is used.

The bearer of amulet in our inscribed pendent seems to have been a woman and has the name *Tnʿm*/ Tan‘um. This suggestion is based on the fact that primarily women in every day life worshipped the goddess ‘Uzzayān. This personal name can be read as *Tnʿm*/ Tan‘um and may be considered as a woman name. Two Sabaic women that carried this name are known (RES 4368,[10] 4540). However, *Tnʿm* as a man name is also attested.[11]

6 CIH = Corpus Inscriptionem Semiticarum IV.
7 Pirenne, J., Corpus des inscriptions et antiquités sud-arabes II, 275.
8 Ryckmans, J., ‘Uzzā et Lāt dans les inscriptions Sud-Arabes, 193-204.
9 This inscribed amulet is published by N. Nebes, Ein Beschrifteter Goldanhänger aus dem Friedhof von Šaʼūb, *Archäologische Berichte aus dem Yemen* IX, 227-231. This inscription is translated by N. Nebes as follows : “Schütz des Orakels auf Ba‘lat”.
10 RES = *Répertoire d’épigraphie sémitique*. See Sholan, A., Die Frauennamen in den altsüdarabischen Inschriften, Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik 10, Hildesheim, 154.
11 Hayajneh, H. 1998 : *Die Personennamen in den qatabāniaschen Inschrifter*, Texte und Studien zur Orientalistik 10, Hildesheim, 307.


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